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Critical Analysis on Freneau, Philip

Philip Freneau was an American poet during the flourishing of the Augustan Era writing. He was raised reading classical contemporary poetry of writers such as Pope Alexander, a head figure of the origination of Augustan styled writing. Freneau developed a passion for two things in his life, poetry and his country. He sought a way to transform the poetry from which he was raised upon and apply it to the controversy occurring in the Americas during the 18th century.

Freneau was naturally patriotic and greatly desired to witness the colonies claim America, the way in which he played a role was propaganda. He questioned himself, “how can I promote the cause of revolution?” and the response was composed in his satirical, lyrical, poems mocking the British Empire.

Freneau’s readers admired the elegancy his poems could maintain even when presenting a whimsical or gloomy position. Twice in his life, both for long spans of time, Freneau spent his life at sea. His poems are, in return, undoubtedly in touch with nature. His first time at sea was by force when he was imprisoned by the British Navy; when released, Freneau composed a mocking poem titled *The British Prison-Ship* which promoted the colonies’ war. This poem was about the condition of a British Ship; the condition of the ship was run-down, old, broken its features were described through nature—the dead weeds, the solar beams rotting the wood, the sweating decaying men. The poem inherits no fixed form of poetry, but a constantly lyrical prose that delivers an effective image through metonymy of the ship representing British politics and military at that time. Freneau takes a scene which is devoid of any positive character and transforms it to his advantage. He employs the poetic style of old Augustan writers such as Pope Alexander and installs 18th century social issues and customs into the prose format.

The second time at sea Freneau presents more personal contemporary styles that still conform to the lifestyles of 18th century attitudes. On his second venture Freneau departs by choice, here he composes beautiful poems based on nature including his poem, *The Hurricane.* This selection differs from his early patriotic poems because it focuses on the problems all humanity shares, not solely the British Empire. *The Hurricane* incorporates diction which is condescending of natural items for example, “sun descend in gloom” or “death and darkness both surround.” While these descriptions are condescending physically of the natural items such as the sea or a pack of wolves, the author’s contempt is for the humans who cause the environment to decay into such scenarios. This is when the reader begins to question him or herself, “Who is speaking to me? What do they want? Why are they speaking this way?” All the questions that Freneau generates supply a greater desire of his reader to make a difference once they finally discover the answer to the questions.

Freneau ensures that the poem retains its romantic roots by establishing a tone of bitter scorn. The tone is created through the creation of an audience and speaker, through imagery, and through unrelenting diction. For Freneau’s point to become transparent he needed to identify an audience and a spokesperson for his problem. The spokesperson is a man well experienced with the sea and the preparation of a hurricane thus the speaker is likely Freneau himself. No directly intended audience is produced in the poem because Freneau desired for this poem to alter the mentality of how every person treats nature.

Tone is thoroughly produced through the imagery incorporated throughout the whole poem. The poem revolves around nature because nature is the single most romantic entity humans can write about, aside from love. Nature should be important to each being which is why the imagery of nature so greatly promotes the bitterly scornful tone. “What friendship can in tempests be, what comfort on his raging sea?” is a line which exemplifies the tone perfectly. Nature and man are independent of each other, we cannot survive without nature and nature relies upon our very breath to survive. In this line the author’s bitterness is depicted because he questions “how can friendship survive storms” and “what comfort does nature get from our destruction?” The imagery is derived from the pieces “tempests” and “raging sea” because they generate a visualization of the calamity between humans and nature and the unavoidable need for change.

Diction develops tone and a figurative theme. The tone of bitter scorn is detected in phrases such as, “Thus, skill and science both must fall; and, ruin is the lot of all.” The key diction is: “science must fall, and, ruin all” the theme of the poem is displayed in this succinct phrase because Freneau figuratively characterizes man as relative to science suggesting, “if we don’t change we will fall” and figuratively suggest the world will suffocate itself without change—“ruin all.” Tone is displayed in this diction because of the caustic review over mans’ treatment of the environment.

There is a purpose in making the tone so bitterly scornful. The reader pays closer attention when he or she realizes the poem is directed towards them and dares to criticize them. By paying closer attention the reader can easily visualize Freneau’s position and feel obligated to evoke changes. Once the reader understands Freneau’s position, they can reflect upon the positive message encased in the uplifting romantic rhythmic pattern, “You can still make a difference,” Freneau incorporates old Augustan styled writing to conform to his peoples’ modern problems thus contributing to the new formed Augustan era of the 18th century.

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